

Dec. 20 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

pockets. For the sake of America's workers, I call on the Senate to act now on this plan, which can pass the Senate with a bipartisan majority if it is brought up for a vote. If this bipartisan bill gets to my desk, I will sign it.

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language version of this statement.

Message on the Observance of Christmas 2001
December 20, 2001

Christmas is a time of wonder and joy, of generosity and peace, that brings family and friends together in celebration and song. We sing old hymns and familiar carols, we show love for others in the giving of gifts, and we observe the hallowed traditions that make the season special. This year in the midst of extraordinary times, our Nation has shown the world that though there is great evil, there is a greater good. Americans have given of themselves, sacrificing to help others and showing the spirit of love and sharing that is so much a part of the Christmas season.

According to the Gospel of Luke, two thousand years ago, the savior of mankind came into the world. Christians believe that Jesus' birth was the incarnation of God on earth, opening the door to new hope and eternal life. At Christmastime, Christians celebrate God's love revealed to the world

through Christ. And the message of Jesus is one that all Americans can embrace this holiday season—to love one another.

This Christmas we remember those who are without their loved ones. They continue to be in our hearts and prayers. May they experience peace, and may they find hope. And as we again celebrate Christ's birth, may the glorious light of God's goodness and love shine forth from our land.

Laura joins me in wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. May God's blessings of peace be upon us and upon the world.

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language version of this message.

Remarks on the New Oval Office Carpet and an Exchange With Reporters
December 21, 2001

Review of 2001

The President. Don't step on the new rug! [*Laughter*]

We wanted you to see the new rug. It's a tradition for each President to design a rug. And Laura helped design this rug, and I think she did a fantastic job, as you can see. It's just beautiful.

That's the seal in the middle. The border here has got a little Texan in it.

The First Lady. We have the Lone Star.

The President. The Lone Star. The rays are, I think, very dramatic. And so we wanted you to come by and take a look at it.

The other thing is, it's been an extraordinary year for us. We will continue to ask the good Lord's blessings on America during the holiday season, particularly on those who've suffered incredible loss. And we—I hope our soldiers are safe overseas. We appreciate the job they do.

I'm real proud of how the administration and our Government has responded to the attacks on America: Got a good strategy in the first phase of the war, to rout out terror; upheld the doctrine that says that we will bring the murderers to justice and we will hold those accountable who help the murderers; responded quickly to threats to our homeland. Tom Ridge is doing a really good job in coordinating the agencies whose job it is to keep Americans safe.

Every morning I come in here to the desk, and I would read the threat assessments to America. And it reminds me that my most important job of all is to protect the American people from further attack.

On the domestic front, I'm really pleased with what's happened in the Congress to get the education bill, a significant piece of education reform that believes that the Nation should have high standards for every single child and that we ought to make sure that when we spend money that there's results. And along those lines, we also in this bill trust the local governments to make many decisions about educating children.

We also recognize there's a Federal responsibility to make sure that we help schools achieve a very important goal, and that is every child learn to read, something that Laura's been very much involved in.

I'm pleased that we were able to pass the tax relief plan that gave working people their own—let them keep their own money. It turned out to be—by simplifying the code and dropping the bottom rate, for example, to 10 percent, as well as making sure that there's a child credit, increasing the child credit, getting rid of the death tax—all the tax measures were very fortuitous because the economy began to slow

down in March. And I strongly believe that by providing the first phase of tax relief, it helped cushion what could have been a very, very hard landing.

In the House, we passed an energy plan. It's the first time an administration laid out an energy plan. And the House passed it; it's stuck in the Senate. I'm pleased that a good piece of environmental policy was passed last night and that I intend to sign, which is the brownsfield legislation, legislation that will help cities around America clean up old industrial sites. It's really good work, bipartisan work. We've worked closely with members of both parties to get the bill passed, and I look forward to signing that.

The Faith-Based Initiative is such a vital initiative for making sure that there's something beyond welfare for people who have lost hope in life. And that bill passed the House. I look forward to working with the Senate sponsors, Senator Lieberman and Senator Santorum, to get it past the Senate. We need to get a Patients' Bill of Rights done—Bill of Rights done next year.

I must tell you, I'm disappointed that the Senate did not follow up on the opportunity to pass a stimulus package that would have taken care of workers. We worked really hard with members of both parties to get legislation that would do two things: one, help workers by extending unemployment insurance, as well as helping them with their health care; and then there was the stimulating part of the package that would encourage investment and job creation. It just didn't get done, and that's a big disappointment. I know there was enough votes to get it out of the Senate, had there been the will to get the bill done. And maybe early next year we can work on it again.

But all in all, it's been a fabulous year for Laura and me. We're so grateful to be living in this compound, and I'm grateful to be working in this office. It's a joy to walk in here every morning, realizing

that I'm the President of the greatest country on the face of the Earth.

Anything you want to say?

The First Lady. Happy holidays to everybody and——

The President. Why don't you say something about the rug?

The First Lady. Do you want to hear more about the rug?

Q. Where was it made?

The President. Thank you, Terry [Terry Moran, ABC News]. [*Laughter*]

The First Lady. It was made, actually, in New York. Edward Fields is the company. I went and watched as it was being made. They have—it was very interesting. They have huge racks that the rug is up on, and then they developed this electric needle that sort of looks like a drill, and the yarn is actually sort of painted on with this electric drill.

We took a long time working on the design of it and the colors. We went back and forth several times with strike-offs on the colors until we got what we liked. I think it's really pretty. They've done a beautiful job.

In late January, we're going to ask everyone who had to do with the Oval Office—Scalamandre, who made the couches and—the fabric on the couches; Brunschwig, the fabric on the drapes; the Drapery House, which is also out of New York, that made them; the museums that loaned these paintings from Texas; Tom Lea's widow, Sarah Lea; W.H.D. Koerner's son, who we found through Joey O'Neill, who loaned that painting to us. So we'll ask you back at that time to meet all the people who had something to do with the decorating of the Oval Office.

Q. Mr. President, can we ask you a question?

The President. Sure.

Situation in Afghanistan

Q. Do you think that perhaps the cease-fires and the talks about possible surrender

negotiations gave bin Laden a chance to sneak out of Afghanistan or——

The President. Ron [Ron Fournier, Associated Press], I don't know where he is. I haven't heard much from him recently. And—which means he could be in a cave that doesn't have an opening to it anymore or could be in a cave where he can get out or may have tried to slither out into neighboring Pakistan. We don't know. But I will tell you this: We're going to find him.

And one of the things I said early on in this war was that—I told the American people that this administration would be patient and would be relentless. And you're talking to a patient man when it comes to achieving the objectives, because I understand the degree of difficulty has increased significantly.

The first part of the objective was to destroy the Taliban's military. That was relatively easy. Secondly, the objective was to hold those accountable who had harbored Al Qaida. It took a while, but once we were able to bring our military strength, made our military strength—air strength, in particular—with boots on the ground, commitment of troops, it unfolded well.

Now we're on the hunt. And we're chasing one or 2, 3 or 4, 20 individuals at a time. And this is pretty rugged country, as you know. And so we're slowly but surely chasing down every single lead. And as our friends and allies take over more and more of the country and as the new Government gets, in the beginning, gets into place, we'll continue to get good intelligence, and we'll continue to chase Mr. bin Laden and others, Abu Zubaydah, Zawahiri—I could give you the list of names. But if they think they can hide from the United States, they're making a terrible mistake again.

And we'll get him; we'll bring him to justice. I wish I could give you the exact moment, but I can't. And frankly, since this administration is in the fight against terror for the long pull, I am not the least bit

anxious about bringing a particular individual to justice. I know that we've disrupted the Al Qaida network.

Today I was briefed that there are hundreds of Al Qaida fighters being held hostage. And by the way, we're in the process of developing a system to deal with each and every fighter, depending upon the nature of the fighter—how to deal with them legally. And I've instructed the National Security Council to take their time and to come up with a process to deal with foreign Al Qaida fighters, Taliban, Walker. I have no answer on Walker yet because I want the process to be able to address all the different circumstances that may arise, and then we'll be able to brief the country as to how we're going to deal with these people.

John Walker Lindh

Q. Mr. President, on John Walker, are you nearing, though, a decision? Can you describe who you're consulting with, and have you—[inaudible]—up anything?

The President. Well, I tasked the National Security Council to work up a strategy on how to deal with each and every person that we capture. And obviously, Walker is unique in that he's the first American Al Qaida fighter that we have captured. And we will announce to the country when we have made up our mind on all—on how to deal with a wide variety of cases.

Walker, himself, is being well treated on a ship of ours that is—I suspect he's finding his berth a little better than it was when he was placed in the prison in Afghanistan. And we've heard, the administration has heard from his lawyer, and we've told his lawyer that at the appropriate time we'll let everybody know, including his family, how we're going to proceed with Walker, as well as others that have become captured during this war. But no, we don't have an announcement today.

Q. And nothing has been ruled out? Like treason—have you ruled out treason?

The President. No, nothing has been ruled out because I want to make—obviously, every decision we make at this point will set precedent for future decisions. And I want us to fully think through all the ramifications of the different options. And Defense and the Justice Department are taking the lead on preparing a strategy.

This ought to be a strategy, by the way, that when we capture somebody who has a certain characteristic to him, that then the process ought to automatically kick in as to how that person is dealt with. And I think we owe that to the country, to take our time. And then I'll make it clear—somebody will make it clear once the decision is made.

Economic Stimulus Package

Q. Sir, would you consider bringing—or asking Congress to come back early and finish the economic stimulus?

The President. No.

Q. Are you angry at anyone in Congress?

The President. No, I'm not angry at all. I'm joyous. I welcome the holiday season. No, but I don't intend to bring them back early.

Q. What is the impact of not passing a stimulus before the end of the year?

The President. Well, the impact was, it was disappointing.

Q. What about for the American people?

The President. Well, we'll just have to see. We'll have to see what the effects are. And we'll have time when they come back to take a looksee at the state of the economy. We're continuing to get mixed signals. Hopefully, the economy will be good, but we'll just have to—we'll deal with it when we get back.

But I think the people, a lot of people are going to ask the question, why couldn't they get something done? And one of my jobs was to facilitate an agreement. And I went up to Capitol Hill, as you know—one of my rare appearances up there—and sat down with Democrats and Republicans

from both bodies who had made the commitment to work together to get a bill. And there was a great—it's a very good bill, by the way, billions of dollars of help for displaced workers. And the will to get something done just wasn't there.

Q. Mr. President, do you think a stimulus is a must?

The President. Is a—

Q. Is a must.

The President. Oh, a must. We'll see. I thought it was important to get a good stimulus package out, as well as I thought it was very important to take care of displaced workers. And the bill that I have supported and my administration helped craft, with both the Democrats and Republicans, would have done just that. But we'll see when we come back and take a look.

Nature of the Coalition

Q. Mr. President, you had said that the next phase of the war, following the defeat of the military in Afghanistan, would be hunting down these groups wherever they existed across the globe and that countries who didn't work with us were against us. So do we have any sort of timelines or goals that we've set up for these countries where we know Al Qaida and other groups that we've put on our list of terrorism are functioning, where we're going to say at a certain point, you're not doing as much as we had expected of you?

The President. Yes, I hear what you're saying. Well, I also said that sometimes the war will take place and actions will take place that the American people won't be able to see. And by that I mean that this is a multifront war that will be effective when we cut off money or encourage governments to round up Al Qaida cells. And we are encouraging governments to try to round up and sometimes—and bring to justice Al Qaida cells. But it wouldn't be very wise for me to describe those to you because the Al Qaida cell we're trying to round up may flee.

But yes, we're constantly talking to countries, reminding them that "If you're with us, perform." I'm a performance-oriented person; I believe in results. And many of the world leaders that have been here in the Oval Office will tell you that one of the strong messages that I send is, "Thank you for your condolences. I appreciate your flowers. Now arrest somebody if they're in your country, and we will help you. We'll give you the intelligence necessary to show you who they are and where they are. And we will—if you need be, we'll be glad to lend some troops." Now, that hasn't happened yet, but the enemy needs to know that we're on the hunt. And part of being—and our friends need to know, if you're a member of the coalition, we expect you to perform.

Q. Are there any—I mean, obviously, you're not going to delineate for us the conversations that are happening, but are there any phone calls going to countries, our friends, our allies, you know, "We're watching what you're doing"—[inaudible]?

The President. All the time. All the time we're reminding people that this is a performance-oriented world. If you want to win the war on terror, you must perform. And a good area, for example, is in the financial area, where we're constantly working with nations to help them chase down money that is moving illegally. There's a lot of cooperation.

But you asked a very interesting question, "Do you keep a scorecard?" And the answer is, I do. I do, because I'm an old baseball guy, and I like to keep the score. I like to see who's performing and who's not performing. It's a part of being a coalition.

Tommy Franks said something interesting the other day—and by the way, he was one year ahead of Laura at Midland Lee High School. [Laughter] They were "Fighting Rebels" together. [Laughter] But Tommy said, "This war—the phase of this war is kind of like a baseball game." Of course, my ears perked up. He said, "There

will be a lot of moments of boredom, and then there would be some great joy as we”—what he was saying is that we’re in a slow pursuit to achieve the objective that Ron talked about.

Last question.

Domestic Security

Q. Sir, can you say that the country is more secure today and less vulnerable to terrorism than it was before September 11th?

The President. Yes, sir. The country is more secure today and less vulnerable to attack than before September the 11th because the enemy has made it clear that we are a target, and we’ve responded. America never dreamt before September the 11th anybody would attack us. We knew there were threats. During the summer there had been some threats to overseas assets that we responded to. But we really never felt that—we had the sense that we’re invulnerable. And now they’ve made it clear that they’re not afraid to attack us.

And so, one, we’re aware. Secondly, we have got a much better system of sharing information—information we gather overseas to agencies here at home. When we get a hint—and by the way, as a result of the coalition, there is much more intelligence-sharing going on. So oftentimes we’ll get a lead from an intelligence service, say in the Middle East or in Europe, and that piece of information will be analyzed and passed immediately on to the FBI, that has now shifted its culture from one of doing important work like white-collar crime or spy-on-spy work to prevention. That is the most primary job of the FBI,

is to prevent a further attack. And there’s over 4,000 agents working on every single lead we get, leads that sometimes prove to be false but sometimes indicate that there could be somebody here in the country that intends to do us harm. And we will use whatever resources necessary to haul them in if that’s the case.

So yes, the country is safer. Is it still—totally safe? No. And that’s why, as I’ve told you, my main job, my main worry for America, is to prevent another attack. Every morning at 6:50 a.m. in the morning, I come in here, and I think about the possibilities. And every day I meet with the FBI Director and Tom Ridge and John Ashcroft, along with George Tenet, reminding them that we have an awesome responsibility to do whatever we can to protect the American people. And we’ve made great progress since September the 11th.

The American people need to know that even though we go into a holiday season, this Government will be doing everything we can to keep our country safe. We’re keeping the CAPs up, we’re keeping—those are military flights around—just to make sure if somebody tries to attack us, there will be—we’ll have the measures in place to prevent it.

Listen, I hope you all have a great holiday. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:10 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Abu Zubaydah, a leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; Ayman Al-Zawahiri, founder of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad; and Gen. Tommy Franks, USA, commander in chief, U.S. Central Command.